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The Young Rough Riders — Weekly —

Most Fascinating Western Stories



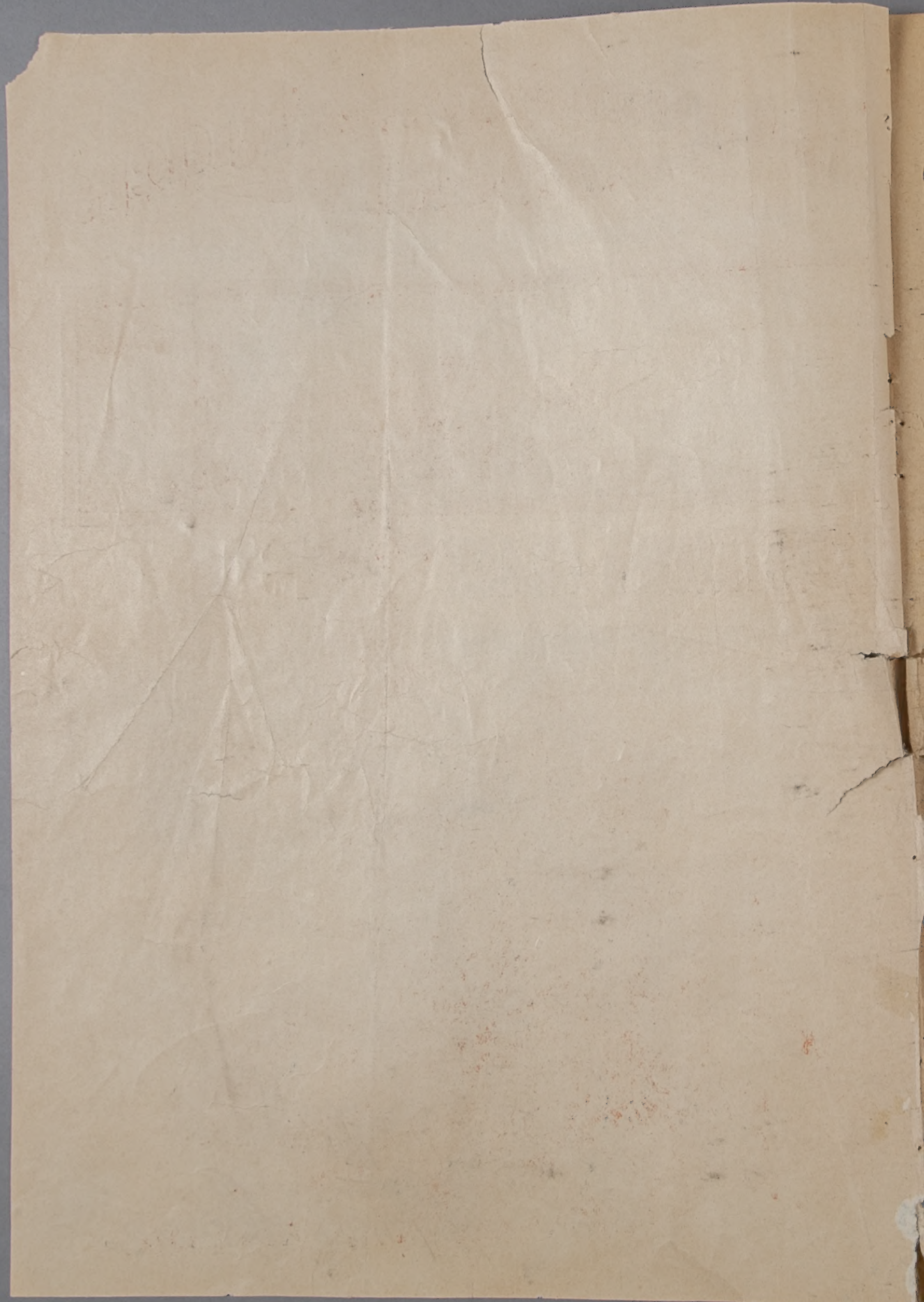
TED STRONG'S CHASE

OR The Young Rough Riders
on the Trail —



BY

NED TAYLOR



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By NED TAYLOR.

CHAPTER I.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

Two boys were riding across the prairie, westward from Crook City, the tall buffalo grass brushing against their knees and their horses urged forward to their utmost speed. One of them was handsome, dark-eyed and dark-haired, with a slender, erect form and a seat in the saddle that left little to be desired. There were marks of dissipation on his face, however, lines under the eyes and about the mouth, that gave it a cruel look, and, in spite of the regularity of the features, there was something unpleasant and repellant about the face.

The other horseman was thin and pale, with cold,

gray eyes and bad teeth. So far as build went, he might have been a boy of sixteen, but there was a look of cunning about the eyes that is seldom seen in a boy. He rode poorly, jolting up and down in the saddle, leaning nervously forward and almost losing his seat at every swerve of his animal.

As he rode, he continually half turned and glanced back, wiping the dripping sweat from his brow. His whole face wore a frightened, hunted look.

The dark boy glanced at his companion and laughed. "Ashford," he said, "you are amusing—but Ashford isn't your name any more now. The jig is up. The secret is known. The cat is out of the bag. I might as well call you Hendricks. That was a pretty slick

trick you played on the young rough riders and on Ted Strong—making them think that you were a brother of Algernon Ashford, the capitalist, who is in the mining company with them, and getting away with a bag of their gold dust as well as setting fire to their stamp mill. I rather admired your nerve when you pulled that thing through the way you did. You even got next to Ted Strong's girl and got her sore on him. I admired you then. But now—why, you're so scared that it is funny. Excuse me if I laugh at you."*

Hendricks flashed an ugly glance at his companion.

"That's all right, Rossiter," he said; "go ahead and laugh. It was you that put me up to the whole game. I planned to get away with a little money and let it go at that, but it was you who put me up to the setting fire to the stamp mill and interfering with the girl. It's that, and not the loss of the money, that has got Ted Strong after me so hot and heavy."

"I paid you for it, didn't I?" said Rossiter, sharply. "What are you talking about?"

"You paid me for it," snarled Hendricks, "but you don't take into account that I am in a pretty rotten box at present. The stealing of the gold was a trifle. I would have gotten away with that easy enough. They wouldn't have followed me out of the county for that. But this setting fire to the stamp mill—that's arson and means twenty years in jail. They might lynch me for it."

"Funny," laughed Rossiter. "Did you have a pleasant time in that dugout there in the woods when the people were hunting for you far and wide?"

"Pleasant time!" said Ashford. "I wouldn't go through that again for ten thousand dollars, let alone the measly thousand you gave me. Do you think you can hide me safely at Sunset Ranch or wherever it is you are going now?"

"I guess so," said Rossiter; "but what a joke it would be if you were caught. They ran across the empty dugout shortly after I got you out of it. They are sure to be right after us. Wouldn't I have the laugh on you, if they caught you?"

"The laugh might be on you," said Hendricks, in a rasping voice. "Suppose I was caught. They'd give me a chance to talk, they would. And do you suppose I would stand there and keep my mouth shut like a fool and let you go free when you put me up to the game? Not much. There would be two people get it in the neck if I was caught."

Earl Rossiter threw himself around on the back of his horse and rode close alongside of Hendricks.

"Just cut out that line of talk," he grated. "If I hear another word of that kind from you I'll leave you to be run down. Just split on me. Try it once and see if they'll believe you. Do you suppose anyone would take your word against mine? Why, I am a gentleman, you skunk!"

"A nice sort of a gentleman," muttered Hendricks.

"Cut that out. Just go easy or I'll knock you off your horse. I'll take you prisoner myself and turn you over to the sheriff. If I should take you in among those miners, at Crook City, who were thrown out of work and lost money through that fire and showed you to them, do you think that they would listen to much talk from you? Do you think that any charges you might make against the man that captured you would count? Not a bit of it. It would be the tallest tree and the longest rope for yours, and they would discuss the merits of the case after you were planted. You can't scare me with your talk. And don't think that you can blackmail me, either. It's no good. The less you have to say the better."

Earl Rossiter had plenty of courage and nerve, and he had Hendricks under his thumb by this time. Hendricks, although a much older boy than Rossiter, had

*See YOUNG ROUGH RIDERS WEEKLY, Nos. 26 and 27.

been nothing but his tool, and Earl, in his unscrupulous, selfish way, knew how to handle him.

"I was only fooling," muttered Hendricks. "You know, of course, I was only joking."

"Of course," said Rossiter, with a sneering laugh, "I was only fooling myself. We are really the best of friends. But still I can't help laughing at you, you are so scared. You are simply scared out of your wits."

Rossiter laughed loud and long, but Hendricks made no answer this time. He pounded forward on his horse, still looking backward nervously.

"They will follow us here, all right," said Earl. "There isn't much question about that. They were pretty hot on your trail this morning. They must have found that dugout by this time, and they will track you down in this direction."

"How far is it to that ranch house of yours?"

"A mile or so," said Rossiter, with a smile. "We will see it from the next rise in the prairie."

"I wish we were there," puffed Hendricks; "this hard riding is killing me."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Rossiter, enjoying the distress of his companion. "You were a fine recruit for the young rough riders, weren't you? A precious lot of use you would be in herding cattle. Why, I wouldn't give you a job washing dishes on my ranch. Ted Strong had you for a recruit to his band, did he? He'd a-found you mighty valuable as a vaquero."

"That's all right," said Hendricks. "I put it all over Strong with that game I played on him. I had him fooled just as bad as I had Ashford fooled. Ashford thought I was his own brother. The only fellow that suspected me was that dark-eyed kid, Kit Summers. He was snooping around all the time with that other little sneak, Bob Martin. I'd like to choke that kid with his Shakespearean quotations. He's about the freshest kid in the whole gang. The whole push of them was ready to pile into me at any minute, but he

was the worst. I don't see how those fellows can make out to run a ranch or a mine or anything else. They may be able to ride horses, but they haven't got much horse sense."

If there was any sort of talk in the world that Earl Rossiter liked to hear, it was abuse of his enemies, Ted Strong and the young rough riders. He had been fighting them so long, had been defeated so often by them, that his hatred for them had become the ruling passion of his whole nature and possessed him like a mania.

"Did you see Cole Carew hanging about there?" he asked. "I hear that he has joined forces with them."

"You mean that long-armed, freckled-faced fellow?" said Hendricks, the words being shaken out of him, as it were, by the steady leaps of his horse. "He is out on the prairie somewhere with a gang of cowpunchers working for the Black Mountain outfit. He had some kind of a row with Ted Strong, but he took a job with him all the same."

"I guess he had to or starve," said Rossiter. "He hadn't a red cent. There's gratitude for you. I brought that fellow out West here. I paid his fare and promised him work on the ranch. He was starving when I met him—shining shoes or selling papers or something of the kind in New York. I helped him when he had no friends."

"You expected to get something out of him if you did," said Hendricks.

"Maybe I did," said Rossiter, "but that doesn't make any difference. He should have some feeling for his friends."

"You have a lot of feeling for me, haven't you?"

"I am helping you to escape."

"Because you are afraid that I'll split on you if I am caught."

"Give me much more of that talk," said Rossiter,

"and I'll do what I threatened. I am not bluffing. I get even with everyone who bucks up against me. It may take long, but I finally get even. I never rest till I get my revenge. I'll get even with Ted Strong yet, and I am going to make that fellow Carew pay pretty dearly for what he has done. I know something about the past of that fellow and I can land him in a pretty hole. I am just getting some evidence together. He'll go to jail yet."

"Look behind," said Hendricks, hoarsely; "men behind on horseback."

Earl looked and lashed his horse.

"They can't see us yet," said Earl; "they have the sun in their faces. Sunset Ranch is right ahead. We can see it now. Make a race for it and take that gully there where we will be hidden."

Five minutes later the two had reached the ranch house, turned over their horses to a vaquero and disappeared inside. Five minutes after that Ted Strong, a deputy sheriff and several other men, among them Kit Summers and Bud Morgan, rode up to the ranch house.

CHAPTER II.

THE PARTY IN PURSUIT.

Ted Strong had been in the saddle all that morning. A search had been made far and wide for the man who had set his stamp mill afire. The stamp mill was now in process of repair, and, thanks to the steady courage of the young rough riders in fighting the flames, the damage to the Black Mountain Mining Company's property was far less than had been expected.

Ted, however, was determined on tracking down Hendricks, the young man who had impersonated a brother of Mr. Ashford, his friend, and who had thus won the confidence of the young rough riders. Smoot, the detective, who had ferreted out a good many facts

about the past life of Hendricks and knew that he was wanted on several criminal charges in San Francisco, did his best to run him down. He had every train that left Crook City watched, so that it was impossible for Hendricks to leave the place in that way.

The miners, who were enraged to the boiling point at the dastardly plot against Ted Strong, had organized searching parties to scour the woods and plains about the town, but for three days no trace had been found of Hendricks. Rossiter was seen in Crook City, but he denied knowing any such person, and as there was no definite proof against him, his denial went.

At the end of the three days, Ted sent for Bud Morgan, who had been managing things up at the Black Mountain Ranch while Ted and the other young rough riders were busy at the mines. Ted had a great deal of confidence in Bud's ability as a scout and trail finder.

Months before, Bud had followed a trail all the way across the Mojave desert, and Ted considered him as good a scout as there was to be found in the Northwest.

He was not disappointed in Bud's ability, although Smoot, the detective, laughed at the idea of anyone being able to track a man by footprints across the prairie.

Bud found footprints leading away from the mine which he said had been left there on the night of the fire. There had been rain the day before and no rain since. The footprints had been left there when the ground was wet. The other boys had all gone and come to and from the mine by the regular trail. Those prints ran off through the forest and out on the prairie to the westward. Bud argued that they must have been left by the man who had set fire to the stamp mill.

"Jumpin' sandhills!" said Bud, "thet there is his trail shore. It stands ter reason. Ef ye hold thet trail an' foller it ye'll strike him shore."

Smoot said that it was nonsense, but Deputy Sheriff Wayburn, who had a warrant out for the arrest of Hendricks and who was in a hurry to serve it, took another view of the matter altogether.

"We'll follow Bud Morgan," said Wayburn, who was a short, rather stout man, "and if we don't strike him it won't be our fault. I know Bud from 'way back, for he useter work on the ranches about here years ago, and I never knew him to go on a wrong steer nohow—leastways, when he was sober."

"Jumpin' sandhills!" said Bud, "I'm sober now. I've shut down on ther corn juice fer keeps. Ted Strong here has made me a blue-ribbon man."

"I'll vouch for his sobriety all right," said Ted, "and I am willing to follow his lead when it comes to scouting."

Accordingly, a party consisting of Ted Strong, Bud Morgan and three deputy sheriffs, as well as Wayburn, set out after Bud. They were all well mounted, and Bud made tracks across the prairie at such a rate that some of them had doubts as to whether he saw or was following a trail at all.

They changed their opinion, however, when they came to a dugout cabin out in the midst of the long buffalo grass which showed signs of recent occupation.

There were embers of a fire still glowing before the door and the remains of a meal scattered about on the hard, earthen floor of the cabin.

"What did I tell ye?" said Bud. "Here is where he rested. Here is where he tied up his horse. Here is an old handkerchief of his. Jumpin' sandhills! I've seen him a-wearin' thet there handkercher myself. It's too swell fer an ornery coyote like me er Ted here. We hes ter be contented with ornery bandannas. But this here is silk an' I hes noticed it around ther neck of thet there measly coyote."

The handkerchief in question, which Bud raised from the ground, was of dark red silk, and both Ted

and Kit remembered having seen it in the possession of Hendricks.

This discovery convinced the others that Bud was on the right trail, and when Bud, after an examination of the ground, said that two horses had come there a short time before and left, going to the westward, the others were quite ready to follow his lead.

"No time to lose fooling around," said Bud. "Jumpin' sandhills! those fellers have an hour's start on us an' we'll have ter hunch ourselves ter git 'em."

"I can follow them within the county," said Wayburn, "but I cannot pursue them outside of it. My authority won't allow me to do that."

"Then if we can't catch them before they get over the border, you are going to give up the chase?" said Ted.

"Have to," said Wayburn.

Ted swung into his saddle and slapped the side of his horse.

"There is not a minute to lose," he said. "That fellow Hendricks has run away from officers of the law before now. He knows the lay of the land all right, and you can bet that he is heading straight for the border now. Bud, climb on your cayuse and set the pace. We'll have to land that fellow."

Bud was nothing loath. He laid hand on the pommel of his saddle and vaulted into it without touching stirrup or mane. The deputy sheriffs mounted hurriedly and the whole cavalcade set off at an easy lope.

Bud had to go slow at first, his shining blue eyes scanning the ground in front of him and his whole face showing an eagerness and intensity of purpose that reminded the others something of the attitude of a sporting dog that has scented game.

"Good thing it's early yet," said Bud. "There was dew on ther grass when those fellers started, an' when they struck it, it bent down an' stayed bent after it dried. I kin see their track as plain as day now."

For half a mile Bud kept on a steady lope. Then he raised his hand in the air.

"Strip o' moist ground here! Sort of a bottom. They've left a track in it like they was a couple of elephants. Come on, boys, an' hit it up!"

There was a cheer from the others, and impetuous Kit Summers forged ahead at a gallop. The rest came close behind, riding hard and fast, a steady jingle of stirrup and spur, a steady rhythm of beating hoofs, the sweetest music for a true plainsman's ears, marking their progress.

Through buffalo grass, up rise and down slopes, Bud Morgan never slackened his pace, and the others in solid phalanx behind him came on like a company of charging cavalry.

A mile further on Bud pulled up and then swung about.

"They headed a little more ter the southward here," he said. "They turned offen to ther south. If we keep our eyes peeled we may catch sight of them any time. Jumpin' sandhills! ther trail is growin' hotter. We are near them now."

The galloping horsemen swung about and headed in the new direction.

"Sun shining in our eyes now," panted Bud, "makes it hard ter see ahead. But we air on ther right trail all right. Trust me fer thet."

"We are headed straight for the Sunset Ranch, where Earl Rossiter lives," muttered Ted.

"I am not in the least surprised at that," said Kit. "We are pretty sure that Rossiter put the fellow up to burning the stamp mill. There isn't much question about that. And I am pretty certain that he is the man who brought the two horses to that dugout this morning and is helping the fellow to escape at the present moment."

"Stands ter reason he is," said Bud. "Why, if Hendricks were ter be caught, as I trust he will, ther

first thing he would do would be ter bring Rossiter inter ther mix-up. An' ye kin bet that little Earl don't fancy thet there idea fer a cent. Besides, I know as how Rossiter is wise ter ther fact of where thet dugout we found is. Do you remember, Ted, how Ro'rin' Bill tackled us out on ther prairie ther fust day we ever met an' ye giv' him a little lead in ther shoulder?"

"You bet I remember it," said Ted.

"Well, thet there dugout is ther very place where he went ter get nussed from his wounds. One of his gang who hes turned decent an' is workin' on er ranch now, tole me about it. He said that Roaring Bill was laid up there with a fever for days and that Earl Rossiter knew where ther place was an' went out there ter see him."*

"Then it's quite likely that Rossiter thought of the dugout as a likely place to hide his friend and keep him out of the way. He was about the only man around town, outside of Roaring Bill's old gang, who knew anything about it."

"I knew about it," said Bud, "an' ef you fellers hed sent fer me I would hev took ye to it right away."

"You fellers were up on the ranch," said Ted. "I couldn't tell you about it till you came in to the ranch house. But are you sure you are still on the right trail?"

"Look ahead," said Bud, "and see ef ye kin see anything."

Kit Summers shaded his eyes from the sun and looked forward over the shimmering grass. It was nearly noon then and the glare was blinding.

"I can see Sunset Ranch dead ahead of us," said Kit. "The last time we were here was when we took part in the Wild West sports and rough-riding competition that Rossiter gave."

"I can see something more," cried Ted. "I can

*See YOUNG ROUGH RIDERS WEEKLY, Nos. 1 and 2.

see two men on horseback going around the side of the house. At least, that's what I make it out from here."

"We've got 'em!" yelled Kit. "Come on, boys!"

The horses had been galloping before, but now they were launched forward at a dead run, *ventre à terre*, as the Canadian backwoodsmen say.

With a thunder of hoofs like the roar of an avalanche they charged down the long slope that stretched out toward the ranch house. There was a gully crossing the plain thickly grown with sage brush. Ted's horse took it without breaking his pace, rising to the jump like a bird. The others went after him at once, and the ride from that point to the door of the Sunset Ranch house was more of a cross-country race than anything else.

Had Ted Strong been mounted on Black Bess he would have won the race. But he was mounted on a sorrel, and although it was quick, Kit Summers had a speedier horse. He arrived at the door before Ted and threw himself to the ground. Earl Rossiter, cool and unruffled, arose from a seat on the porch and stepped to meet him.

"Well, gentlemen," said he, "what can I do for you?"

CHAPTER III.

TOO LATE.

"We come for the fellow that just went in here!" said Kit.

"What fellow?" asked Rossiter, coolly.

"Hendricks," said Kit.

At that moment, Ted Strong and the others came clattering up and dropped from their horses.

"Come in, gentlemen," said Earl, bowing politely to them. "Mr. Strong, I am delighted to see you. I don't know to what I am indebted for the pleasure of seeing you all, but I am glad to make you welcome to

Sunset Ranch. Give your horses to Pancho and come up and sit down. You seem to have been riding hard."

Pancho, a brown-faced, grinning vaquero, dressed in velvet trimmed with tawdry gold lace, stepped forward to take the horses.

Ted looked into the eyes of his enemy and knew in his heart that Earl Rossiter was deceiving him and playing a part.

"We have been riding hard and we have been pursuing some one. We are looking for Hendricks, the fellow who set fire to my stamp mill, and we are convinced that he came in this direction."

"How interesting! Really, you surprise me. He came in this direction, you say?"

"Yes," said Ted, sternly, "and I regret to say that we will be forced to search your house for him."

"He is not here."

"We will have to search all the same."

"And suppose I object to having my house invaded by a party of armed men?"

"Jumpin' sandhills!" cried Bud Morgan. "Object ef yer went ter. It won't do yer no good."

"We intend to search for him," said Ted; "we are certain that he came here."

"I have been here sitting on the porch reading since breakfast. I assure you I haven't seen him."

Ted turned to Bud Morgan and spoke to him in an undertone.

"Surround the house," he whispered. "Get Wayburn and his men posted all around it. See that no one leaves it. Hendricks may be making his escape by the back way even now."

Bud needed no second command. He waved his hand to Wayburn and the deputies all drew back with him in a solid bunch. After a moment's consultation they separated and took positions on all sides of the house, sitting their horses with carbines at the port and watching closely every possible avenue of escape.

Earl Rossiter watched this maneuver with raised eyebrows.

"What does this mean?" he said. "Do you suspect me of harboring fugitives from justice in my ranch house?"

"We don't suspect anything," said Ted. "We know that Hendricks came this way——"

"But I tell you that he didn't," interrupted Earl.

"We know that Hendricks came this way," went on Ted, as though he had not heard what Earl had said, "and we will have to search the house."

"Suppose I forbid you to enter."

"Suppose you do. I have a number of men here. We have warrants for the arrest of this man. We intend to search the house even if you do object."

As Ted spoke, his voice hardened into a metallic ring and his eyes grew cold and steely. His hand dropped naturally on the butt of the six-shooter at his belt and remained there with the fingers half coiled around the vulcanite grip.

Earl Rossiter noticed the motion and his face changed suddenly.

"I was only joking," he said; "really. There is no necessity for to reach for your gun."

"I am glad there's not," said Ted, leaving his hand where it was.

"And of course I will allow you to make a search," continued Earl. "I was only joking when I said anything that would indicate to the contrary. Come right in and search where you will. I will be only too glad to show you through the ranch house. You have not visited me here in a long time, and I don't believe that you have seen any of the new furnishings I have had put in. Come right in, gentlemen. Bring in the whole crowd and let them have a drink."

"Kit and myself will come inside," said Ted, "but the others will remain on their horses right where they are."

"All right," said Earl. "Come on in and look any place that you please."

He stepped across the porch and into the big room that opened onto it. Earl Rossiter had not stinted money in furnishing his ranch house, and as he was wealthy he had made it as luxurious a place as you could find anywhere west of the Mississippi.

Costly rugs and skins lay on the floors and there were pictures on the walls that must have cost a great deal. Soft, luxurious couches, inviting one to rest, were stretched along the walls and built into the window niches on either side of the room and at one end was a sideboard with a glittering array of bottles and cut glass.

Ted and Kit gazed about them in astonishment. They had never seen or heard of a ranch house fitted up in this style before. The paneling that ran along one of the walls was beautiful in workmanship and design and must have been ordered in New York and fitted in afterward by Mexican workmen.

"Pretty slick workmanship," said Earl, noticing the direction of Ted's eyes; "but won't you have something to drink?"

"We don't drink," said Ted.

"A glass of brandy or a bottle or so of beer. I have some fine Bourbon whisky here and perhaps there is some champagne iced."

"They are all one to me," said Ted. "I would rather have a glass of water than the whole lot of them."

"Funny the way you fellows turn up your noses at the good things of life," said Earl. "As for me, I like a wee nip now and then, and I believe in taking it when you need it. I hate to drink alone, but I think that I will have something now."

He filled a tiny, liquor glass from a cut-glass decanter, sniffed the brandy, tossed it off and smacked his lips.

"Now," he said, "just wait till I light a cigarette and I will be ready to show you all over the place."

"Wouldn't that fellow sicken you?" whispered Kit to Ted. "Look at the airs he puts on, and look at the assumption of friendliness he makes. He hates us both and he knows that we know it. He has done you a thousand injuries and I don't doubt that he wishes us both dead at the present moment. He is a hypocrite if ever there was one."

"Never mind that row," said Ted, in the same tone. "We are in his house and we have to be civil to him. Besides that, picking a quarrel with him won't help the business that brought us here. We came here to get Hendricks and that is our first lookout."

Earl had got his cigarette lit by this time and started to show the boys through the house. He took them from room to room, pushing draperies aside to let them see the walls beneath, making them look under beds and moving furniture on all sides.

Ted and Kit searched every nook and cranny that they could find, going up to the big roomy garret of the ranch house and down to the dark cellar beneath it, but they found not the slightest trace of anyone's being in hiding there. Then they proceeded to the large barns and outhouses. As they left the ranch house by the door in the rear they could see the cordon of deputies, sitting their horses like so many statues, still on the watch. Wayburn and Bud had used a good deal of judgment in posting them, taking in the whole *rancheria*, outhouses and all within their circle, and leaving no point that was not covered with eye and gun.

In the stables themselves Ted found two sweating horses. They were unsaddled and in their stalls, munching away at oats, but they were still lathered and wet. There was no doubt but that they had been used recently.

"Look at that!" said Kit Summers. "There are two

sweating horses. They've just been put up in their stalls. The man we are looking for must be somewhere about."

"Vasquez," said Rossiter, turning to a vaquero who was rubbing down a splendid thoroughbred in the next stall. "do not these steeds belong to two of the vaqueros who came in from the southward a little while ago?"

"Yes, signor," said Vasquez; "they have but now stepped out."

"You will oblige me by mustering all the vaqueros and letting me look over them," said Ted, coolly.

"Don't you think you are asking a good deal of me?" said Rossiter. "But we were all such good friends for such a long time that we must do what we can to oblige each other. Vasquez will call the men together."

The vaqueros and cowboys about the place were soon mustered past Ted, and in the meantime Kit made a tour of inspection through all the houses where they lived, near the other ranch buildings. But it was all to no purpose. No trace of Hendricks could be found. He seemed to have disappeared by magic.

"Are you satisfied now?" said Rossiter, with an ill-concealed sneer, when Ted had finished his inspection.

"I have to be," said Ted. "I am not satisfied as to results, for I have not found my man."

"But you are satisfied that he is not in hiding here. Just what I told you."

"I am satisfied that if he is hidden here, he is hidden too thoroughly for us to find him. But I want to go back and talk to my men if you will excuse me for a moment."

"No go, eh?" said Wayburn, when Ted walked up to him. "I thought that Bud must have followed a wrong trail out on the prairie there."

"Jumpin' sandhills!" said Bud. "I didn't follow no wrong trail. The trail led here all right."

"If we can't find him here we will have to give him

up," said Wayburn. "I can't keep my men hanging about here on any wild chance of the fellow being here. And besides, after it got dark we couldn't watch this place so that he couldn't get out if he was foxy."

"And you mean to give it up here, then?" said Ted.

"Sure I do," said Wayburn. "I think we struck the trail a little too late and that our man is out of the county by this time. That's what I think."

Ted tried to persuade the sheriff to wait in the neighborhood for a time, but he saw at last that it was no use. Wayburn wanted to get back to his own business. So did his men. They had given up their pursuit of Hendricks as a bad job.

"Well, I tell you what you can do," said Ted, finally. "Turn over the warrant to me and I will try and serve it myself."

Wayburn took the warrant out of his pocket and handed it to Ted.

"Take it, my boy," he said. "I am glad to be rid of it."

"Bud," said Ted, turning to the cowboy, "get back to the mines and Black Mountain. Get the boys together. Kit and myself will stay here near the house and watch. We were too late to nail Hendricks, but he hasn't gotten away yet. Get the boys down here as fast as you can. I think your trail was all right and I am going to stick to it."

"Bring all the boys?" asked Bud.

"All of them," said Ted, "and bring them quick."

Bud tossed back his mane of yellow hair and let out a cowboy yell that made all the horses near him start.

"Hooray!" he yelled, in his shrill tones. "Long yell fer me! Hooray fer the young rough riders! They is goin' ter take the trail and make things hum. Clear the way fer the Black Mountain boys."

His horse swung around as he spoke, and away he went at a mad gallop, his hair streaming wildly in the wind and shining in the sunlight, his wide sombrero

clinging flapping about his face, and the tapideroes from his big Mexican saddle snapping in the breeze.

In the meantime, Ted and Kit were taking their departure. Ted intended to stay near the place, but did not let Rossiter know of his intention. He rode off presently with Wayburn and the other deputies. Rossiter watched them depart, and turned inside the house with a sneer.

"It's all right now, Hendricks," he said. "Those idiots have taken a sneak. You can come out."

A door in the paneling at the end of the room swung open. It had been so cunningly made and let into the wall that no one could have found it when it was closed without tearing down the woodwork. Hendricks stepped out of the dark closet that it disclosed, looking very pale and sick.

"Sure they're gone?" he asked.

CHAPTER IV.

A QUIET EVENING AT SUNSET RANCH.

"Quite sure," said Earl. "One of them rode away like a madman. I think he's crazy, anyway, and the thought that they had been foiled in their attempt to catch you simply made him violent. The others trotted off in a bunch with their tails between their legs. They were the worst lot of fooled people that I ever saw. They're gone, sure enough. Do you know, Hendricks, playing a trick like that on Ted Strong does me more good than medicine. He thinks he's so horribly smart."

"I am glad he missed my hiding place," said Hendricks. "I was just shaking when I heard you tapping on the very wainscoting in front of me. You are certainly a pretty slick article, Rossiter!"

"Pretty slick idea letting that closet into the wall there," said Earl. "I don't know how I happened to do it. I was getting it made. I have quite a taste

for the woodwork, you know, and I got a man in New York to trim that up for me. Then when I was putting it up, it struck me that it might be a pretty good idea to have a secret closet built in the wall. I never thought of any practical use that I could put it to, but, you see, it turned out to be pretty useful."

"Useful, all right," said Hendricks, "but comfortedly uncomfortable. Are you sure those fellows have gone? They might see me in one of the windows."

"Sit down and be happy," said Earl. "There are blinds over all the windows, and, besides that, the fellows have gone. I should think you had enough standing up in there."

"I did," sighed Hendricks, sinking into a chair. "It's the most uncomfortable place I ever hid in, and I've had some narrow escapes in my day. Give us a cigarette."

Earl handed over his case and Hendricks lit up.

"Do you know," he said, "if you had a drink in the house I think I could stand it."

"There's some stuff on the sideboard," said Earl. "Help yourself."

Hendricks immediately grasped a glass and a bottle.

"Not that one," said Earl; "that is my own private stock of brandy. That stuff is worth seven dollars a bottle. I don't allow anyone to touch that but myself."

"All right," said Hendricks, picking up another bottle. "I am not so particular as all that. Most anything will do me."

He filled himself out a good-sized drink of whisky, tossed it off, took a swallow of water after it, and sank into his chair with a faint tinge of color showing in his pale cheeks.

"That's the stuff that puts the heat into you," he said. "I needed it, too. I feel better now."

"You need Dutch courage," sneered Rossiter.

"You haven't the heart of a chicken yourself. You are simply scared blue."

Hendricks gave the dark-haired boy a very odd look, but said nothing aloud.

To himself he muttered: "I'll get even with you yet, you conceited, overbearing fool. You are implicated in this thing as much as I am. If I don't bleed you and blackmail you till you are sorry that you ever met me, I miss my guess. I've got some notes you wrote me in which you mentioned the burning of the stamp mill and showed that you were mixed up with it. That gives me a hold on you. Wait till I get out of the present danger. Wait till the hue and cry dies away. Then I will make it hot for you."

"What are you muttering about over there," said Rossiter: "speak up."

"I was just saying that it might be a good idea to send out some scouts to see if there is anyone hanging about outside. They may be waiting out of sight somewhere yet. Their going away may be only a ruse. They know, like enough, that I will make an attempt to escape some time about dark, and they may be lying in wait. When I leave this place I don't want to walk into a trap. I have had enough excitement for the present."

"Hendricks," said Rossiter, taking a long pull from his cigarette and blowing the smoke out from his lips in a heavy cloud, "there are times when you show glimmerings of common sense. I think your suggestion is a good one. Pancho!"

Pancho, noiseless and smiling, appeared suddenly at the door.

"Get some of the boys to take a look around about dark, and to see if anyone is waiting about the place outside. We want to keep our eyes peeled for spies and eavesdroppers about here."

"Yes, sir," said Pancho, and he slipped away.

"Good man that," said Rossiter. "I can trust him."

He's ready to do anything for me, and he's got plenty of horse sense. I guess we had better stay indoors till evening. There is a fresh horse all saddled up for you outside, and it's in fine condition for a long run. It will take you fast enough, and get you outside of the State before morning. I know a pass through the mountains to the northward, and we can strike a railway station up at Frenchman's Forks, in Montana. It's going to be a long ride, but the exercise will do you good. Ha! ha! look at the faces you make when I speak of riding. You are not much of a horseman, are you?"

"Don't profess to be," said Hendricks; "but what do you say to throwing dice—a little friendly game to pass away the afternoon."

"I don't know," said Rossiter; "I think I will back my luck against yours any time. I have pretty good luck in most things. I've got away with a good many things that would have tripped up most people. I'm a sort of man of destiny, I am."

"You are the most conceited puppy I ever saw," thought Hendricks. "See if I don't trim you before I get through with you." Aloud he said: "You do have good luck. You have all sorts of good luck—money, a good physique and ability. Some people are born that way, and, no matter what they do, they always seem to win out."

"Nothing like having good blood in your veins," said Rossiter, assuming a very complacent expression. "Nothing like it! I come of a good family. I am a gentleman by birth. In this country they affect to sneer at birth. But there is a lot to it. Look at that fellow, Strong. What refinement has he? What does he know about life?"

"Not a thing," said Hendricks, a cunning expression coming into his pointed, rabbit face, as he poised a dicebox in his hand. "Shall we begin?"

"Sure," said Rossiter; "throw away, old horse. I'll show you that I can beat you at this as well as anything else."

They began to throw. At first, Earl Rossiter won, and, delighted with his success, he boasted a great deal in a loud voice, and drank freely of his precious brandy.

His face became flushed, his eyes bright and shining. His hand shook a little as it handled the dicebox, and his voice went up a little in key and became very loud and shrill. He seemed to shout everything, although he did not know that he was speaking above an ordinary key.

Hendricks, on the other hand, drank nothing. With him liquor was a stimulant, a medicine that gave to his weak and miserable frame a sort of fictitious strength and steadiness that it lacked. His face grew paler than ever, but his hand was as steady as a rock. His light, ugly eyes narrowed to slits in his face, and his mouth hung open, showing his long, upper teeth, that protruded in his narrow jaws like those of a rabbit.

Presently he began to win. First small amounts and then greater. Rossiter, heated and inflamed by the poison he had been pouring down his throat, began to play wildly and extravagantly, seeking to win back all he had lost by a single throw.

Hendricks' keen eyes noticed the condition of his companion. He began to try tricks with the dice that he would not have attempted before. He cracked them cunningly in the dicebox, making them fall any way he pleased.

The yellow sunlight began to stream through the slits in the venetian blinds in nearly horizontal rays, marking the rugs on the dark floor with bright yellow bars like the stripes on the tiger. The room, save where the sunbeams smote into it, grew darker and darker. The two boys crouched over the table seemed forgetful of the flight of time, forgetful of everything save the fall of the dice.

Presently Rossiter arose, and, with an oath, called for lights.

Pancho entered and lit a hanging lamp over the table, and the game went on once more.

The sunbeams turned from yellow to red, and then began to fade. A loud, monotonous drone of insects began to arise on the still air outside and float in through the windows.

The full moon, rising slowly over the eastern mountains, turned the ranch home to a house of silver.

marked with ebony shadows. Still the two boys continued their game.

Rossiter was losing heavily, and Hendricks, bent forward over the table, was raking over silver, and gold, and copper time after time. Rossiter began to throw out greenbacks, leaning lazily back in his chair, flushed and hot. The table seemed to sway to and fro before him, and he could not get it to stand steady before his eyes.

"Horse and horse," said Hendricks; "your throw."

Rossiter threw—a pair of deuces; threw again, and made it three.

Hendricks threw three aces.

"My money," he said, raking it in eagerly. "I think the luck is changing."

The door was pushed open and Pancho appeared again.

"Vasquez has just come in," he said. "He reports a body of men camped somewhere in the woods near the house. They have no fires, but he is sure there is some one there."

Rossiter arose and steadied himself. The room was swinging about him dizzily.

"Body of men encamped?" he said. "Encamped where?"

"Some in woods," said Pancho. "Vasquez thinks they go out on prairie now around the house. Sit down in front of house as though they watched. Young men, boys, Gringos dressed in yellow soldier clothes."

"The young rough riders!" gasped Hendricks, with a sharp intake of his breath.

"Ted Strong," said Rossiter, leaning unsteadily against the corner of the table. "Pancho, I feel a little sick and dizzy. I must have lost a good three hundred dollars."

"Not quite that," said Hendricks. In reality it was a good deal more.

"Don't matter, anyway," said Rossiter; "I'm a sport. Dead game, I am. Lose every cent I have and not put up a squeal."

Hendricks had passed over to the window and was peeping out at the night from the slits in the blinds.

He could see nothing but darkness, but in his imagination that darkness was peopled with young rough riders, khaki-clad boys, strong and merciless, bent on taking him. Rossiter, the man he depended on for safety, was lurching on across the room, drunk. Hendricks shivered as though with cold, as he drew away from the window.

CHAPTER V.

ROSSITER BRACES UP.

Earl turned about unsteadily and looked at Hendricks.

"Hendricks, old horse," he said, with a hicough, "looks as though you were up against it."

"Can't you help me out of here? Are you going to leave me this way?"

"Hol' on there," said Rossiter. "I may drink and I may gamble, but I don't go back on my friends. You think I am drunk. So I am, but I'm all ri'. I'm going to see you through. I never go back on my friends. Can always bank on me. Pancho—bring me some hot coffee."

Pancho had seen his master in a similar condition before, and he knew that strong coffee and plenty of it had a wonderful effect in bracing him up.

He returned in a few minutes with a silver coffee pot and cups on a tray.

"Sugar, Pancho, but no cream," said Rossiter. "No cream in mine. Bad for th' kidneys. Worse than booze. Watch me brace up."

One, two, three cups of the hot, black fluid were tossed off, while Hendricks trembled and gazed apprehensively out of the window.

When he looked again at Rossiter, the boy was sitting in his chair. The flush that the brandy had given him had left his face now, and it was white and drawn. But his eyes were bright and steady, and he looked as if he were recovering his wits.

"I feel all right, now," he said, and Hendricks noticed that his utterance was thick no longer. "I am all right, now. Playing with you I forgot and took a little too much of that brandy. But the coffee is the stuff. It straightened me up, all right. Hendricks

do you know, I have a wonderful constitution. I can stand anything."

"But what about those fellows outside?" said Hendricks. "Couldn't I dress up as a vaquero and get away that way?"

"Not in a thousand years," said Rossiter. "I might, but you couldn't. You can't ride well enough, me boy. There is a bright moonlight to-night, and they would spot you in a minute from your seat in the saddle. You can't work it that way. Pancho! bring us something to eat! We are hungry."

Pancho came with food a few moments later, and Rossiter, sitting down to the table, ate heartily. Hendricks made a pretense of joining him, but he was too frightened to eat, drinking several cups of coffee in imitation of Earl, but getting very little solid food down his throat. At length Rossiter sat back and looked at him.

"I have a plan," he said. "I have been thinking while I was eating. I am going to turn a good trick on these young rough riders, make them a lot of trouble, and succeed in helping you away at the same time. Just pay attention to me, and you'll see that I have head enough on me to outwit Ted Strong and all the rest of them into the bargain. You know I have a grudge against this fellow, Strong. You know that I am anxious to get square with him."

"I have no particular use for him myself," said Hendricks, cheered up considerably at the way Earl Rossiter had steadied himself.

"Those fellows are camping on my land now," said Earl, "and they have no right there. I would have a perfect right to drive them off if I had many men behind me. I have half a dozen vaqueros here. These cursed rough riders are pretty good fighters. We must give them credit for a certain amount of bulldog courage. My vaqueros know of them by reputation, so they won't fight them. There is no use trying to make them do it."

"These Mexicans are all cowards," said Hendricks. "I wonder you have them about the place. But how about getting me out of here?"

"We'll attend to that all right," said Rossiter. "I

have a dandy plan. I'll get you out and hit this fellow, Strong, a good slap at the same time. You won't hear much of Ted Strong's rough riders after to-night."

"What are you going to do?" asked Hendricks. "Fire upon them from the house?"

"Those fellows are too foxy to let me do that," said Earl. "I have a herd of cattle about a mile from here up the mesa. I am going to send the vaqueros out in a bunch. The rough riders will stop them, perhaps, but they can explain that they are bound for some outlying point, some of the distant ranch camps where they are making a round-up. These rough riders will expect to find you among them, but they will be mistaken. They will let the bunch through. My men will take a turn about behind the herd of cattle. There are about two thousand in the herd. They will stampede them right across here, right across the young rough riders, and they will catch them as sure as fate, if they are not on their horses. Those steers will come charging across like an avalanche, and when they get past you won't see much of the young rough riders—not much! They'll be just wiped off the map! Isn't that a bully idea? In the midst of the mix-up we can sneak you out of the back and can get you away. I will go with you to guide you. I'll take you into the mountains, and the rough riders will never see you again."

"I hope so," said Hendricks. "I have seen all I want of them."

"I'll get you out all right," said Rossiter. "It may cost me a few cows, but I never went back on a friend in the past, and I am not going to now—just depend on that. And it will give me a good chance to get square with Strong."

"He may be knocked down and trampled to death by the cattle," said Hendricks.

"That won't be my fault, it will be his own. He has no right to be hanging about here with his men. I can't help it if my cows stampede and injure or kill him. I am not responsible for his safety. It won't be my fault."

"It seems a good plan," said Hendricks. "When are you going to start?"

"Now," said Rossiter, rising and moving toward the door; "I am going to speak to Vasquez and the other boys now. I will get them started off all right, and then we will sit here comfortably and peep out the windows and wait until things materialize. And they will materialize pretty, darn quick. You can bet on that."

Rossiter left the room, and, for a matter of ten minutes, was in close colloquy with Vasquez and the other vaqueros. In the meantime, Hendricks busied himself counting the money which was in his possession. Including the money he had received as a bribe from Rossiter, and the money he had won from him, there was nearly eight hundred dollars all told. Besides this, Rossiter had shipped the bag of stolen gold dust to a friend of his in New York, and he could call and get the parcel when he arrived there.

"I wish I was back in New York," he muttered; "this wild Western life is a trifle too rich for my blood. I want to get back in the land of civilization. I will have a nice handful of coin when I get there. I'll have a fine time in the Tenderloin. I will have the price to make things hum. But this sort of thing is fierce."

He peered apprehensively out of the slits in the blind, and then glanced over toward the sideboard.

"I'll have some of that fine brandy he sets such store by," he muttered. "He is out of the room now, and I'll see if it's as good as he says it is."

Hendricks tiptoed over toward the sideboard, poured out a drink and tossed it off. He had scarcely done so when Rossiter returned to the room.

"It's all right now," he said. "The boys understand just what I want. They are out back now, saddling up. You'll see them ride out presently. We will put this light out and watch things from the window here. What a cinch it is! We can sit here and watch the whole performance, and at the proper moment we can light out. It's like finding money. That shows what it is to have a head on your shoulders and to use it."

Rossiter turned out the light, and, drawing a chair over near one of the windows, pulled up the blind and sat down in front of it.

"Come over here," he said, "and watch the fun."

Hendricks drew up a chair and sat down.

Outside the night was very calm and still, save for the distant cry of a coyote or timber wolf, and the hum of insect life in the long grass. The moon had risen high by this time, and the prairie before them was illuminated with a ghostly white light that made everything seem strange and unreal. In one direction could be seen the dark line of a stretch of timber; in another the prairie, a sea of silver, seemed to stretch clear to the horizon.

The utter peacefulness and serenity of the night, the calmness that pervaded all nature, made the struggle that was going on between Ted and Earl seem strangely out of place.

To Hendricks, crouching in the shadow of the window niche, it seemed impossible that khaki-clad forms, armed and spurred, were lying in those black shadows, ready to leap upon him and take him prisoner if he ventured outside.

It seemed impossible that within a short time a desperate fight would be going on between boys and a herd of infuriated and terror-stricken cattle before his very eyes.

The two boys sat in silence at the window for ten minutes. Then came the sound of hoofbeats and the jingling of saddle equipments. Five vaqueros, shrouded in Mexican mantles, dark and romantic figures, crouching forward over the pommel of their saddles, came out from the side of the house and into plain view.

"Watch now and see the fun," whispered Rossiter, touching his companion on the knee. "You just wait a minute. You will see those fellows stopped and challenged. I told them to make a break to get through without being stopped. Of course, they will be stopped, but the young rough riders will be fooled all the worse."

They could see the shadowy figures of the horsemen moving slowly away from the house till they struck the long grass of the prairie. Then, from somewhere in the darkness, came a deep bass voice. It was that of Beanpole, who had been posted at that spot.

"Halt!" he cried. "Stop there! Don't come any further."

But the Mexicans did not halt. Vasquez, their leader, had his instructions from Earl Rossiter, and he carried them out to the letter.

"Halt, or I'll fire!" said Beanpole, rising suddenly, tall and slim, out of the long grass.

Vasquez slapped the side of his horse so that it started forward at a gallop.

Crack! Beanpole's carbine flashed yellow in the darkness, and its leaden messenger whizzed past so close to the nose of the horse that it went back on its haunches. Had not Vasquez been an admirable horseman he would have been thrown. Before he could recover himself or his steed, lanky Beanpole had sprang forward and grasped the bridle rein. His carbine was dropped to the ground, and he pulled a revolver from his belt, presenting it to Vasquez's head so close that its cold muzzle almost touched his brow.

"Up with your hands!" cried Beanpole, "or I'll give you a dose of medicine you won't like."

On the same instant the grass of the prairie suddenly bristled with the ends of rifles and carbines. Figures sprang out of it in all directions, and a second later, every one of the five Mexicans were brought to a standstill.

Earl Rossiter and Hendricks, seated in their vantage coign, could see the whole thing like a scene in a theater. They could even hear the voices of the young rough riders as they talked among themselves.

"Hold them fast," said Bob Martin. "As Billy S. remarks: 'There is a tide in the affairs of men which, seized by its forelock, leads on to fortune.' This is the tide."

"I haf von feller," quoth Carl, "bud I don'd know oof he iss der right one."

"Jumpin' sandhills!" said Bud Morgan; "ther whole shootin' match is no account. If I had my way we'd take 'em all prisoners an' jest charge 'em with general cussedness."

Kit Summers and Ted passed up and down the line of captured Mexicans, looking closely at each one.

"He is not there," said Ted; "let them go."

Rossiter had the satisfaction of seeing his hirelings ride off as he had planned.

"Now," he said, "those fellows are slinking back in the grass again. They have the horses hobbled a little distance away, and they are on foot. Just wait. We'll see the whole bunch wiped out in about half an hour."

CHAPTER VI.

OUTSIDE THE RANCH HOUSE.

Crouched in the long grass, scattered in a sort of rough circle about the Sunset Ranch house, lay the young rough riders. They were all armed with carbine and revolver, their web belts, which they had donned that day for the first time in months, were heavy with cartridges.

It was seldom, indeed, that Ted Strong resorted to physical violence or the force of arms, and the young rough riders, in spite of the fighting reputation they had won for themselves, since their organization the spring before, were as peaceable and quiet a set of boys as you could find anywhere. But Ted knew that there were times when a resort to force was necessary, and when soft measures were useless. This was one of those times. He was in pursuit of a criminal, a man who, if caught by the miners at Crook City, would have been given a short shrift and a long rope. He was a man who had done Ted a grievous personal injury, but he had done more than that. He had committed a crime against the public, and had thrown hundreds of honest men out of employment or a means of livelihood by his burning of the stamp mill. Ted had talked the matter of the trails over and over again with Bud Morgan, and he was firmly convinced that the fugitive was hidden somewhere about the Sunset Ranch house.

He knew that Rossiter would hesitate at nothing to get the best of him, and that he would do all in his power to help Hendricks to escape. He knew that his friends were entering upon a dangerous mission when they attempted to run down Hendricks in defiance of Earl Rossiter, and he meant them to be prepared to meet force with force. He was an officer of

the law himself, a deputy sheriff of the county, and he had warrants in his possession for the arrest of Hendricks. He was filled with a stern resolve to make that arrest, and his comrades, full of a love for adventure and burning with a desire for justice and fair play, were with him to a boy.

He had examined the Mexican's closely, but there was not the faintest doubt that they were not what they pretended to be. While they had been under examination, Ben Tremont had been posted where he could command all the other entrances to the house so that there was no possibility of the fugitive's escaping in some other way, such as by using the Mexicans as a blind to distract the attention of the young rough riders. This had been Ted's first thought when he saw the vaqueros riding forward in the moonlight, and he had been on his guard against such an attempt.

"Well," he said, as he threw himself down in the grass beside Bud Morgan, "he didn't get away with that batch, and I am pretty confident that he is still there."

"He's there all right," said Bud, rubbing the stock of his carbine against his cheek: "no question about that—and the young rough riders have that place closed in as well as it kin be. We are workin' this year game accordin' ter all thier military rules an' regulations, all right."

Ted raised himself on his knees and glanced around him. Not a man was in sight, anywhere. The horses were all tied to a picket line which had been stretched in a nearby arroyo. There was not a sign of life anywhere. The ranch house itself was dark and gloomy, and the moon and stars looked down on a scene as peaceful and quiet as may well be imagined. Ted knew, as he lay there, that his young rough riders were crouched on all sides of him in the grass, watching the ranch house with eagle eyes, every muscle tense, ready for a fierce conflict at any moment. He could not help contrasting the grandness and serenity of nature with the strife and contention that fills the hearts of men. The prairie stretched about him on all sides, vast and mysterious in the silver moonlight, and

the parcel of boys lying in wait in the midst of it, seemed lost in a boundless sea.

"I wonder if Rossiter expects to put up a fight and rush this man through our lines that way?" said Ted, lying down again.

"I dunno," said Bud; "hope he does. I'd like ter hear ther snap of my old Wunchester's magazine as it pumps up ther shells. It's a long time now sence ther young rough riders was under arms, so to speak. We uster have ter use our Wunchesters at ther first, all right. Jumpin' sandhills! We shore hed some lively times when we fust started ter ranchin'. Do ye remember Roarin' Bill an' how he had us corralled on ther prairie? And do ye remember how his wife durn near killed ye and then ye had yer fight with Cheyenne Dick? Jumpin' sandhills! Thet was ther time when ye diskivered ther gold mine. Them was great times!"*

"I remember them well enough," said Ted. "I guess all of us do. I think it was the odds we had to fight against when we were first making our way in the West that bound us so closely together. It was the hard times and trouble we had in those days that made us see the value of true friendship and faith in one another. If we had enjoyed an easy time and no opposition at the first, when we started ranching, I don't believe that the young rough riders would be so compact and closely knit an organization as it is now. It's trouble that really proves people and shows what there is in them."

"It showed what was in some of ther boys, all right," said Bud. "Jumpin' sandhills! There was one time when I thought that Kit Summers was about ther orneriest little coyote what ever happened. That time when he got mad at you an' ran off and tried ter get a judge to holt up yer herd of cattle from crossin' ther country? I've learned more about him sence then. Kit's a white man, if ever there was one."**

"You bet he is," said Ted. "A man who has Kit for

*See YOUNG ROUGH RIDERS WEEKLY, No. 11, entitled, "Ted Strong's Gold Mine; or, The Duel at Rocky Ford." In this story you will learn of the facts concerning the discovery of the gold mine now worked by the Black Mountain Mining Company at Yellow River.

**See YOUNG ROUGH RIDERS, No. 5.

a friend has something worth while. It isn't everyone Kit takes to. He is hot-headed and impulsive, and he sometimes takes strong prejudices. But he sticks by those he likes, and would go through fire and water for them."

The two boys lay in silence for a while, Bud Morgan silently rubbing the stock of his carbine against his cheek and looking at the polish he gave it, and Ted lying prone on his face, his chin resting in his hands, thinking.

"There was a time," he said, at length, "when I thought there was some good in Earl Rossiter. We once had a reconciliation, you know, and from what I saw of him then, in spite of all his faults of temper and pride, I could see that there was something lovable, something attractive about him."

"I'll be durned ef I could ever see it," said Bud.

"I could see it; so could you if you understood him. Bad company has been the bane of his life. He has been led astray in countless ways. Kennedy, that army officer who died of apoplexy, flattered him, humored him to the top of his bent, did all he could to rob him of all principle, and used him for his own ends. It's too bad."

"I wish he would come out an' give us a fight," said the unsympathetic Bud. "I wish he would try to rush Hendricks through our lines. I haven't been in a piece of gun play fer so long that I forget how it feels ter have the bullets sizzin' about you."

"Very unpleasant," laughed Ted. "I can testify to that. But I am pretty sure that there will be no fighting to-night. If Rossiter had intended to make a play of that kind, he would not have weakened his force by sending off some of his vaqueros. He has too much horse sense for that. He is probably thinking of playing a waiting game. I can stand that. We have provisions with us, and we can send one man back for more."

"Suppose'n he comes out and tries ter drive us off that mesa?" said Bud.

Ted squared his jaw.

"Let him try it," he said. "We are here on lawful business, looking for a criminal, and we are going to

stay here as long as we please. It's a glorious night, isn't it?"

"Fine," said Bud. "Often when I was out on the trail, I've seen nights like this, peaceful an' quiet like, when there wasn't a thing stirrin'. I useter lie back in my blankets an' look at ther stars an' moon a-marchin' past in ther sky. All a-goin' ter ther westward. I useter lie awake fer hours an' watch them trailin' up, up one side of the sky and down, down ther other. Seemed ter me like it was a fine percession, like what the Indians make when they all march apast in their feathers an' war paint, big kings and chiefs all glittarin' like gold."

"It's a sight worth watching," said Ted, in a low voice. "Many a night I have lain awake to watch it myself."

There was silence for a space, both boys, the yellow-haired cowboy and the brown-haired young Easterner, gazing quietly at the glittering firmament above them.

Then Bud stirred uneasily.

"Notice anything queer, Ted?" he asked.

"Not a thing," said Ted. "The ranch house is as dark and silent as the grave."

Bud lay down again, but presently he arose and sniffed the air.

"I kin hear something," he said. "Ain't no thunder ter-night, but somehow I kin hear a sorter rumbling sound."

"Maybe summer thunder," said Ted.

"I dunno," said Bud, "but somehow it don't sound all right. It sounds gol-durned queer ter me. Jumpin' sandhills! It sounds like a herd of cattle takin' it on ther run."

"No cattle within a mile of us," said Ted, "and there would be no likelihood of a stampede to-night."

"No, I suppose not," said Bud. "It's quiet an' still."

He lay down again, but Ted rose to his feet.

"I have a queer feeling myself," he said, "and I hear some kind of a rumbling noise. You keep your eye on the ranch house from this point, and I will make a round among the boys and see if everything is all right."

He crept away through the grass, leaving Bud

stretched out. Had put his ear to the ground, listened, shook his head and then put his ear to the ground again.

In the meantime, Ted had come upon Beanpole, crouched in the grass, watching the dark ranch house.

"Well, Thad, how are things?" he asked.

"Bad," said Thaddeus, with a shake of the head. "Temperature one hundred and four, pulse eighty-five. Could they be worse? I have yellow fever, sure."

"Everything quiet at the house?" asked Ted, repressing with difficulty a desire to laugh.

"Everything all right there," said Beanpole. "But everything all wrong with me."

Ted slipped away, knowing that Beanpole, whatever his queer notions about his own health, would attend to his duty and could be trusted.

Ben Tremont was stretched out on the ground in the easiest position possible.

"Ugh," he grunted. "I hope this will keep up for a week. This is the easiest work you ever put me to."

Beyond Ben lay Carl Schwartz. The German youth was curled up into a round ball, his rifle across his knees, his eyes fixed on the house.

"Hello, Teddie!" he said. "Dot Bob Martin is chust beyondt, unt he keeps whisbering ofer to me unt making me all mixed up mit mineselluf."

Ted came upon Bob a moment later.

"Everything quiet along the Potomac," said Bob. "All serene along the Wabash. Ten o'clock and all's well. As Shakespeare says: 'On such a night as this did young Lorenzo woo the fair Jessica; on such a night as this did Beanpole catch rheumatism.'"

Ted was not listening to this, but to another sound, the sound that he had thought was thunder. It was loud and heavy in his ears now.

At the same time the voice of Bud Morgan rang out, high and shrill.

"Look out, fellers!" he yelled. "A big herd of cattle, on their stampede, comin' right fer us!"

CHAPTER VII.

FIGHTING THE HERD.

Bud had not cried a moment too soon. Up to this point the oncoming herd had been shielded by a slight rise in the prairie, but now they were streaming over the rise, down upon the boys in a great black avalanche, shrouded in dust and bearing on its bosom a forest of tossing horns that seemed in the darkness to stretch as far as the eye could reach.

At this moment the horses, picketed out in the dry arroyo, broke into a terrified outburst of neighs and whinnies and plunged madly to be free. Up to this point they had not scented the cattle, as the wind had been blowing in the direction of the oncoming herd.

Ted Strong ran toward the arroyo, brushing through the rank buffalo grass at headlong speed.

"This way, rough riders!" he called. "To the horses, quick."

His voice sounded high and clear above the thunder that now filled the air. The boys arose from their recumbent positions to face the black herd coming straight for them. It seemed, in the half light, not two hundred yards away, and it was pouring down on them at tremendous speed. It meant death to be caught on foot in the path of that herd. Its front had spread out into a broad fan, as the front of a stampede always forms, and there was no hope of getting out of its path.

For a moment they stood bewildered and terror-stricken. Then the cry of Ted Strong reached their ears. Bud Morgan lay nearest the arroyo and was first to reach the horses. Beanpole caught up with him, and in an instant their horses were free from the picket line and they were mounted.

Kit Summers had the position furthest away from the horses and nearest to the oncoming cattle. Ben Tremont lay next to him. Side by side with Ted, Ben raced for the horses, and they reached them together. Bob Martin was already there, but Carl Schwartz and Kit Summers were nowhere in sight. The moon was slipping down behind a bank of clouds by this time,

and the addition of almost total darkness made the situation still more terrible.

"Tackle the cows," cried Ted, swinging into his saddle and cutting the rope that bound his horse to the picket line. "Get at this point and try to swing it away from us. Lose no time. I am going to help Kit."

He was away like a flash, riding toward the herd, his horse plunging madly through the long grass. A figure seemed to arise out of the ground dead in front of them, and the frightened horse reared, nearly falling over backward. The figure was Carl Schwartz.

"I fell down mit mineselluf," he cried. "I don't know vedder der cows has run ofer me or not."

"They haven't run over you," said Ted, "but they will in about half a minute, if you don't run for your life back to the arroyo."

Carl ran as fast as his short legs would carry him, and Ted pushed forward, moving diagonally. The herd had swerved a little off in its course, and its front was now marked by a series of flashes, and the cracks of revolvers, and the sound of ringing cheers. Ted felt a queer thrill run through his heart. The young rough riders were meeting it and fighting it.

But Kit Summers was somewhere ahead of him, hidden by the long grass, and directly in the path of the animals which the young rough riders, after mounting, had ridden forward to meet.

Over toward the ranch house there was a stretch of ground where the grass was shorter, and Ted spurred forward in this direction.

He saw now, from the flashing and shouting, that the herd was turning still further away. Under the direction of Bud Morgan the young rough riders had launched themselves scientifically against its extreme wing, had sent all the weight of their men and horses crashing into that, and had succeeded in swinging it around, back on the main body of the herd, and thus deflecting the direction of the rush.

He looked right and left for some sight of Kit Summers. If Kit had tried to cut over to the left instead of making for the arroyo, he might have escaped the onrush of the herd, owing to the fact that it had been

partly turned by the well-timed attack of his comrades. If he had gone straight on toward the horses, however, his fate was sealed. He could never have made the arroyo in time on foot. The long-limbed Texas cows must have caught up to him by this time, and for a man, caught on foot in that torrent of furious animals, there was no hope. He would probably be discovered on the prairie the following day, but he would be a shapeless mass of mangled flesh by that time. Ted shuddered to think of it.

The moon came out from behind the banks of clouds which had shielded it. A ghostly light illuminated the far-stretching landscape, the broad prairie, the distant forest, the ranch buildings lying white and silent.

Ted could see the herd rolling off to the northward, further and further away.

The big fan which it formed was swinging around, further and further, under the pressure that the young rough riders had brought to bear on one side.

There was still a fitful flashing, a distant boom of revolver shots, and the stragglers of the herd, the slower animals which had been left in the rear, lurching past to follow their speedier comrades.

Still Ted could see no sign of Kit Summers. His heart sank as he looked about him—then gave a sudden leap of joy.

From out of the long grass, almost in front of him, stepped a figure, a boy's figure.

"Hello!" cried Ted. "I'm glad you're safe, Kit!"

The answer to this was a blinding flash and a report—a stinging sensation on the shoulder. Ted tumbled backward out of his saddle and lay unconscious on the ground.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FLIGHT.

The boy whom Ted had taken for Kit Summers was in reality Earl Rossiter. He had stepped out on the porch of the ranch house as the stampede had swept past. In his excitement he had dashed forward and out into the long grass of the prairie.

He could see the young rough riders rushing for their horses, and then swept away for miles on the

front of the flood of cattle that had poured past. He knew that as soon as they had swung the point around so that they could extricate themselves from the rush they would return. But for the moment they would be carried away by the stampede and some time must elapse before they could get back.

He expected his vaqueros, the men who had started the stampede, to ride up at any moment, and he knew that the coast was clear for Hendricks and himself to make a break for the distant hills. He was just turning to go back to the house when Ted Strong loomed up before him on horseback and hailed him. He recognized the figure and form at once, in spite of the darkness. He recognized the ringing voice of the young rough rider, and all the hate that had lain smoldering in his breast for months suddenly burst out now.

"Curse it," he muttered; "he's escaped the rush with his usual cursed luck. He won't escape me now."

Earl had been drinking a good deal that day. He was highly excited, and was burning with rage against Ted Strong. Before he knew what he was doing his hand had slipped around to the revolver at his belt.

"He hailed me to-day," he muttered. "He hailed me down and let me see his hand lying on the butt of his gun as a sort of a threat that he would shoot. We'll see who'll shoot now. We'll see."

Before he had time to think, his revolver was out and leveled. Then came the flash and the crack. Rossiter saw the arms of his enemy, black bars against the moonlight, fly up suddenly into the air like the arms of a child's toy when the string is pulled. He saw the firm, graceful figure suddenly grow limp, like a wet rag, and reel and sway in the saddle. The next instant Ted Strong was lying stunned on the ground, a bullet through his shoulder, and his frightened horse had leaped away madly, almost running down Earl Rossiter in his flight.

Now that he had fired the shot, Earl was frightened at what he had done. Before the shot he had been flushed and burning. Now he shivered. He felt cold, and sick, and frightened.

"I wonder if I have killed him," he muttered, as he

stepped forward toward the prostrate form. "I hope not, but I don't know."

He approached Ted Strong still closer, shaking from head to foot, in a cold sweat. The young rough rider lay as he had fallen, half on his side, half on his back. There was a dark stain on the khaki coat, at the shoulder, and the face of the boy looked ghostlike in the moonlight.

Frightened and trembling, Rossiter stood and looked at his fallen enemy. He had fought Ted for a long time, and tried many mean tricks, but deliberate murder was a terrible thing—too terrible to think of!

"I don't know," he muttered. "I hate to touch him. He's dead, I think. Dead! It must never be discovered. He can be taken away from here. But I will order some of the men to do it. I can't bear to think of it. I can't bear to look at him."

He stepped backward, step by step, keeping his face turned toward the prostrate figure. He was afraid to turn his back to it, he knew not why. He felt that he must keep his eyes on it as he backed away. Then at last, by a strong effort of the will, he turned around and walked over toward the house. Hendricks was there, so were several of the vaqueros.

"Here," said Hendricks; "are you ready? I am waiting to start. The two horses are around behind, all saddled up—hello! what makes you look so pale—what makes you tremble so? You look as if you had seen a ghost."

"Nothing's the matter with me," said Rossiter. "I guess those young rough riders are out of the way for the present. But there is no time to lose. We can't get out of here too quick."

Earl had not the courage to speak of what he had done. Besides that, he had an instinctive feeling that Hendricks was not a good man to confide a secret of that kind to. He meant to allow Ted's body to be discovered by the vaqueros in the morning, and then to profess utter ignorance as to how it came there. Some of the stray cattle would have run over it by that time and trampled it out of shape. Earl shuddered so that Hendricks looked at him wonderingly.

"Come on," said Earl. "Get on your horse."

He flung himself into the saddle and turned to his vaqueros.

"If anyone comes to-morrow," he said, "tell him that I am gone on a little hunting trip. Say you don't know where. I don't care whether they find out or not. By that time Hendricks will be safe aboard a railroad train, and it will be too late."

Hendricks was slowly mounting his horse, holding it in with difficulty. Earl spoke to him irritably and urged him to hurry.

Then the vaqueros had the view of the two of them riding off in the rays of the setting moon.

For a mile or so the two boys rode along in silence. Then the road began to get rougher and wind in and out, making stony buttes and gulches through which the torrents poured through from the hills in the rainy season. Earl took the lead at this point, telling his companion briefly to follow him, and, for another mile or so, the two wound on up a scarce distinguishable trail. The ground rose higher and higher before them.

It grew colder and darker. The moon had set, and they were getting into a higher altitude. Scrubby pine trees grew down close about the path now, and forests, dark and mysterious, hung above them, darkening the higher slopes of the mountains like a pall.

Hendricks had noticed the strange silence and pallor of his companion, and could not fathom it. He knew that his friend had been drinking a great deal that day, but he had seen him drunk before, and he had never acted this way.

"What's the matter, Earl?" he asked. "Don't you feel well?"

"I am all right," said Earl. "Get a move on you. We want to get out of this cursed valley. We want freer air than this. I am smothered down here. I hate the plains. It is the mountain tips that I want."

Hendricks spoke no more, and they pressed on in silence. The fugitive from justice was strangely ill at ease. He knew that he had successfully eluded the young rough riders, but his present situation did not seem to be very much better than the former one. His only companion was a boy, whom he had always feared and failed to understand. Now he could understand

him less than ever. Rossiter's pale visage and wildly staring eyes, his taciturnity and stern tone when he did speak, terrified him. Could it be that he was going crazy? He was alone with him on this wild mountain side.

Hendricks glanced about him and thought that never had he seen a more depressing or terrifying view. They were in the pine woods now, and dark boughs hung low over their heads. The track before them was winding and so steep that the horses could not move at anything faster than a walk. When there was a vista in the trees Hendricks could catch vaguely in the darkness, the notion of a vast expanse of rock and forest, a steep mountain side, full of shadowy terrors. What if Rossiter should attack him? He knew that Earl was stronger than he was, and the two were alone together. He felt in the bosom of his blouse, where he had concealed a little, derringer pistol, a double-barreled antique weapon, not a revolver, that he had picked up that day in the Sunset Ranch house.

Rossiter turned his head sharply.

"Looking for your gun?" he asked. "You have no need of a weapon here. There is no danger here."

Hendricks was frightened, but tried to appear at his ease.

"I was just looking for a handkerchief," he said, with a forced laugh, "but, if I didn't know you, I would think there was danger. You look fierce enough to kill a fellow."

"Kill a fellow!" Earl reined back his horse and almost yelled out the words.

Hendricks edged away from him as far as the narrow road would permit.

"What do you mean by that?" asked Rossiter, in a queer voice.

"I—I was only joking," said Hendricks. "What's the matter?"

Earl slowly recovered his composure.

"I didn't catch what you said," he remarked. "I heard you say something about killing. I don't like talk of that kind. When you want to make jokes make them on other subjects."

"Of course," said Hendricks. "I beg your pardon."

"I didn't mean to startle you. I didn't mean to make you jump like that."

"I didn't jump," said Earl. "There is nothing the matter with me. Come on."

On and on they went, higher and higher, over the ridges of the mountains. It grew colder and colder. The trees were more sparse and scrubbier now. They had passed through the timber belt and were now coming out on the higher ridges of the mountain, where it was bare and cold, and where the wind, sweeping down from the northward, pierced them to the very bone.

Hendricks shivered and drew his coat close about him. That night, so far, they must have ridden a good twenty miles, but Rossiter was still moving ahead steadily, looking neither to the left nor right, and keeping his horse at a slow trot.

Hendricks began to wonder if his companion had lost the way and was trying to find it again. His weakness was great. He felt that he could lie forward and fall asleep on the pommel of his saddle in spite of the motion of his horse. The cold was trying him terribly. His limbs seemed to be asleep, and felt like lumps of ice.

His hands were so numb that they could scarcely hold the bridle rein.

"Haven't we gone about far enough, Earl?" he asked. "Isn't this about far enough for one night's trip? We must have come a good distance. I am about ready to drop off my horse now."

"I'm not ready to stop yet," said Earl, pulling up his horse and allowing the other to come close up alongside of him. "We will go about three miles further. I have been through here before now, you know, on hunting trips. We are just crossing the crest of this range, and we have crossed it by a pass that everybody doesn't know about, either. If you look on either side of you, you will see that this is the only place where the mountains can be crossed by anything short of a goat. We will camp about a mile further down in a place I know, and where I have camped before. That is only one day's journey to a railroad station in

Montana, and once on the train we will have no more difficulty."

Hendricks noticed that his companion seemed a good deal more quiet and composed now, and his fears were allayed. He concluded that Earl had gotten over the effects of the liquor he had drunk that day, and that he was himself again. As a matter of fact, Earl had gotten over his first thought of horror at having killed Ted Strong, and was beginning to accustom himself to the idea.

"I'm about dead," said Hendricks. "I don't believe I can go another mile."

Earl looked at his companion with an expression of great disgust. Endowed by nature with splendid health and constitution, he had contempt, rather than pity, for those weaker than himself.

"You'll have to keep up," he said. "There isn't any other way out of it for you. Just brace up and be a man for once in your life. Show what's in you."

"I am nearly dead," said Hendricks. "I'd give anything in the world for a drink of whisky."

Earl drew a silver-mounted flask from his pocket and handed it over. The other seized it and drank greedily. Then he glanced about him. He saw that what Earl had said about their being in a pass through the mountains was true. On either side of him towered lofty peaks, their summits shrouded in snow.

"I feel a little better now, thanks," he said. "I guess I can make it."

"You could make it without any trouble at all if you didn't act like a sick baby, with your whining and fainting," said Earl. "You make me tired. You are not worth saving, but I suppose I will have to see you through now, anyway. Come on!"

He shook the reins loose over the neck of his horse again, and the two started off once more. They had reached the highest point of the pass now, and presently they began to go down. Earl knew that path well, and picked his way with wonderful sureness and safety among the rocks. Hendricks was too played out and weak to do anything much but cling to the back of his animal, but the instinct of the horse told it to follow directly in the footsteps of the preceding animal.

It was a gentle descent, for a time, and then it became more precipitous. Ted gave his horse loose rein, going down the rocky path in the darkness at a perilous rate, and Hendricks, unable to control his own animal, followed blindly, expecting to be dashed to pieces at any minute.

Presently the path became wider, and the descent less steep. The horses broke into an easy run. It was so dark that Hendricks could see little about him. He knew that he was passing under trees and over a slight rise in the trail, and then he heard the ripple and saw the waters of a little lake that lay hidden in the mountains. Earl Rossiter checked his horse.

"Here we are," he said. "You can get off here. I am going to stay here all day. It's pretty near morning now, and we both need a good rest."

Hendricks tumbled off his horse to the ground. He was about played out, and he silently watched Rossiter as he staked the two horses out to graze and removed their saddles and spread the folded-up horse blankets, that did service as saddle cloths, over their backs. A few minutes later both boys were stretched out on the ground, wrapped in the blankets which they had carried with them, and falling asleep.

Hendricks slept well—the sleep of utter weariness, that knows no dreams. But with Rossiter it was different. He stirred and moved uneasily, muttering under his breath. Once he cried aloud, such a terrifying shriek that it awakened his companion who lay by his side.

CHAPTER IX.

THE YOUNG ROUGH RIDERS ON THE TRAIL.

When Ted Strong came to himself again he was lying on the ground and some one was holding his head. The moon was setting, but there was still a pale light, in which it was possible to see things with tolerable distinctness. He felt strangely weak and dizzy, and there was an odd, numb feeling in his left arm near the shoulder.

His whole arm was wet, too—wet and cold. He

looked up weakly and saw Kit Summers looking down at him with an anxious, strained face.

For a moment there seemed nothing remarkable in the fact that Kit was there and that he was lying helpless in his arms. Then his mind began to work more clearly. He remembered the events of the evening, and all that had happened. He remembered that he had been looking for Kit and wondering where he was when he had been fired at. He knew now that his arm was wet and cold, because it was drenched with his own blood, and that some one had fired at him from the darkness.

"Hello, Kit," he said, sitting up suddenly. "I am all right. That tumble from my horse stunned me, but, I am all right. You escaped the stampede all right, didn't you? I was looking for you when some one shot at me." He moved his arm up and down, slowly. "They shot me through the arm, but it's only a flesh wound. There is nothing the matter with me."

"Are you sure there is not?" said Kit.

Ted laughed, his ringing, merry laugh that Kit knew so well, and rose to his feet.

"I've lost a little blood," he said, "but not enough to do me any harm. That bullet went right through my arm, I guess. Pull off my jacket, will you? In the pocket you will find some surgical gauze. Wrap it around the cut and bandage it up tight. And tell me how you escaped that rush of cattle when they came past. Here, don't take off the coat. I might have trouble getting it on again, and it is quite chilly to-night. Just slit down the sleeve with your bowie knife. We can easily sew it up again. Bud Morgan has needle and thread in his saddlebags."

Kit set to work immediately. He slit down the sleeve of the khaki jacket and the shirt underneath it. The bullet had not gone through the arm, but had grazed it. Ted laughed.

"Not very much to make a fuss over," he said. "It's little more than a scratch. It took me by surprise, though. I thought the fellow that fired at me was you, and I was so taken back when the shot came that I reeled in the saddle. Then I hit the ground so hard

"I didn't know anything more for a little while. How did you come here?"

Kit was skillfully wrapping the soft gauze around Ted's hard, muscular arm.

"I heard Bud Morgan sing out," said he, "and then I noticed that stampede heading for me. I started to run for the arroyo just as you called, but I saw that it was no use. So I cut off to one side, hoping that the cattle would head off in the other direction. They did all right, as luck would have it. One steer struck me and knocked me down, and I lay where I was till the main body had slipped past. I thought it was the safest place, and it turned out that it was. As I was lying there I heard a shot, and I suppose it was the one that hit you. I think it was Earl Rossiter who fired that shot."

"What makes you think that?" asked Ted, arranging the end sleeve of his jacket as well as he could, and pinning it at the wrist.

"I saw Rossiter riding away from here a little while ago," said Kit. "Hendricks was with him. They were headed for the Big Smoky Mountains."

"What?" said Ted.

"Fact," said Kit. "I guess they are headed for the pass, and if we don't overtake him we make a big mistake. Here come the other boys, and here is your horse. I caught it and I found none in the stampede. Safe and sound. Only the end of the stampede struck it, and the steers seem to have run around it."

There was a clatter of hoofs in their ears now, and the boys, turning, could see the rest of the young rough riders coming at a gallop. Their horses were hot and lathered, but they were all safe and sound. Big Ben Tremont was in the lead. Behind him came Beanpole, Carl Schwartz, and, last but not least, Bud Morgan.

They had been caught in the tide of rushing cattle, and had been forced to go with it for several miles. In order to save themselves from being overrun at the very first, they had charged the cattle on the point of the herd, and then had been caught up in the whirl of the stampede. One by one, they had managed to extricate themselves from the press and ride on to

the side of the herd. Then they had gathered together once more, and started back for the Sunset Ranch as fast as the darkness and their tired horses would allow them. They were all anxious about the safety of Kit, whom they knew to be missing, and they set up a shrill cheer when they saw him standing, safe and sound, by the side of Ted Strong.

"Glad ter see yer, Kit," said Bud Morgan. "Jumpin' sandhills! I thort at first that ye was shore under ther herd. But we tackled them hard on ther flank and throwed them offen to one side a leetle. I guess as how it was a pretty good thing fer you thet we did do thet."

"You bet it was," said Kit. "They were coming straight for me. And there wasn't the faintest chance in the world of my outrunning them and reaching the arroyo first."

"Them cows is a-runnin' yet," said Bud. "I allow as this here Sunset Ranch is a pretty gol-durned slick sort of er place when they let their cows run off like thet in ther middle of ther night. I didn't see none of ther vaqueros around neither."

"Not a soul did we see," said Bud Morgan. "The cattle seemed to have run off for nothing at all. I can't understand it."

"I can understand it all right," said Kit. "I was here and saw the whole thing. That herd was stampeded on purpose. It was stampeded for the purpose of running over us and getting our attention away from that house for a while. Rossiter calculated that we would be so busy with the steers running over us that we wouldn't see what he was doing. That was his little plan, and I suppose he didn't care a rap if the whole lot of us were wiped off the face of the earth in the rush."

"He's a low-down, no-account maverick, who ain't wuth shootin'," said Bud Morgan, "but by ther jumpin' sandhills, I think as how Kit is right, an' thet he worked thet trick jest that way. It's a case of lookin' up trails ag'in."

"I thought there might be something in the wind like that," said Ben Tremont, "but I knew that Ted and Kit here were still at the house, and I thought

that they might take the same idea into their heads and keep a pretty close watch."

"What's the matter with your arm, Ted?" asked Beanpole, suddenly. "It's been bleeding and you look pale."

"I feel a little pale," said Ted, "but I am all right. I got a slight flesh wound in the arm."

"Didt von oof der pulls bite yourselluf as you vent past?" asked Carl.

"It wasn't a bull that did that damage," said Bob Martin, catching hold of Ted's mutilated coat sleeve; "it was a bullet."

The boys crowded around Ted and asked him what had happened. He told them in a few words, and then Kit told his experiences.

"While I was fooling around with Ted," he said, "just before he came to, I saw a couple of fellows ride off toward the mountains. I am certain that those two fellows were Hendricks and Rossiter. They are headed for the pass across the mountains into Montana——"

"And we are going to catch them before they reach Montana!" cried Ted, in a ringing voice. "Earl Rossiter planned that trick pretty well, but he hasn't beaten the young rough riders yet, not by a long shot."

"Here is yer hoss, Ted," said Bud, who had disappeared a little while before. "I saw him cantering about in ther dark jest now, an' I roped him in."

At the same moment Kit Summers came up with his own animal, which he had found safe and sound in the arroyo. Ted looked around at his hand and saw that they were all there. He swung himself into the saddle.

"Now, boys," he said, "we have a plain trail to follow for the hills. We follow it day and night till we catch the fugitives. Forward march!"

There was a ringing cheer and a clatter of hoofs. The young rough riders were on the trail once more.

CHAPTER X.

THE END OF THE TRAIL.

It was well toward night when Hendricks awoke. He had been afraid to sleep at first and had lain awake for a long time, but when slumber finally did come to

him, he was steeped in repose so sound that he did not stir until Earl Rossiter, who had slept himself out, awakened him.

Hendricks sat up and blinked about stupidly. His sleep had been dreamless. He did not recollect, at first, the events of the day and night before, and he had no very clear idea of where he was. He saw Rossiter's face, pale and drawn, staring into his, and his hand instinctively moved to the pocket in which he kept his money concealed. It was all right.

"Come, wake up," said Rossiter, roughly. "You have had sleep enough for three men. Get on your legs and drink this hot coffee. I have been up and lit a fire and made it. Heaven knows I need it. I am so shaky I can hardly do anything. That booze last night, I guess, was a trifle too much for me. No more of it for me. I cut it out from this on. [He held] enough of it. Get up and drink this coffee. Then we'll get started."

"The others," said Hendricks, beginning to remember things; "the young rough riders—have you any idea where they are?"

"I have a pretty good idea we have fooled them and left them behind," said Rossiter, "but I won't feel easy till we get across the border into Montana."

"No more will I," said Hendricks. He tried to get on his feet, and succeeded after one or two efforts. But he was very stiff and sore. Unlike his companions, he was unused to outdoor life, or hard, physical strains of any kind. He had spent the greater part of his life indoors, in cities, and he was easily knocked out by any hardships. He staggered around, rubbing his limbs and groaning. Now that he was broad awake, he ached in every joint, and thousands of pins and needles darted through his flesh as his circulation, which the cold had diminished, began to get better and send warmer blood coursing through his half-frozen limbs.

"I can't move another step," he groaned. "I am played out. I am sore from riding and I ache all over. I am just about ready to lie down and die."

Rossiter handed him over a tin cup of coffee. It held about a quart and was so hot that it burned his

lips and tongue, but Hendricks drained it to the very dregs.

"Feel better, after that?" said Rossiter. "Now get on your horse."

Rossiter had the two steeds already saddled, and he turned over the bridle rein of the one that Hendricks rode. Hendricks made a feeble effort to get into the saddle, but fell backward with a cry of pain.

"I can't do it," he said. "This sort of thing is killing me. My legs are so sore and stiff I can't stretch them across the back of a horse. I wish I had never gone into this thing with you. It's awful. I wish I was dead."

Rossiter had been looking up the narrow trail that led away between two high mountains, the pass over the crest of the range through which he had passed himself, before daylight that morning. He suddenly gave a cry of alarm.

"Some one's coming," he said. "Men on horseback. Get on your horse."

Hendricks did not even look up. He leaned forward, resting his head on his saddle, and groaned.

"Let 'em come," he said. "I am ready to die. Let 'em arrest me. I don't care. I'd be happier in jail than here. Let me alone."

Rossiter was filled with a sudden rage.

"You'd be happier in jail than here," he cried, "you skulking, ferret-faced coward! You want to go to jail, do you? I suppose you do. You want to be tried and then at the trial show what a coward you are by splitting on me. You think you can get free before the end of it all, by turning State's evidence and landing me in jail! You'll not go to jail. If you don't help to get away from the rough riders, by Heaven I'll beat the head off you. I'll kill you before I let you fall into their hands, you coward. I've undertaken to get you out of here free and clear, and I am going to do it. I'm not going to let you stay behind."

Hendricks groaned, but did not stir.

"Get on that horse," said Rossiter, coming close to him, his face white as death and working with passion. Still Hendricks did not move. Rossiter drew

back his fist and struck him brutally in the face. Hendricks staggered back with a wild yell of fear.

"Don't kill me yet," he begged. "Let me alone. Don't strike me again."

Rossiter struck him twice more, stinging blows with the flat of his hand.

"Now will you get on your horse?" he said. "Do you want to stay behind and be captured now?"

"No, no," said Hendricks, rushing for the side of his animal and scrambling on its back with a great effort. "I'll do anything you say, but please don't hit me."

Rossiter cast a glance back along the trail. The figures on horseback were plain enough now. The evening sun was shining on them. They were boys clad in khaki. Rossiter shivered. With one leap he landed in his own saddle and then, grasping the bridle rein of his companion's horse, swung them both around.

"I'm not afraid," he muttered. "I am not afraid of any of those fellows. I have no reason to fear any one of them. Ted Strong was the only man I was afraid of. He's dead now. He can't hurt me."

At headlong speed he drove the two horses down the winding trail. Hendricks had no control whatever of his own animal. His companion was still grasping it by the bridle, and he himself was holding on with both hands to keep his seat. The jolting was terrible, and it seemed to him that he could not keep on much longer. But the fear of rolling off the back of the horse, to be trampled underfoot on the rocky mountain trail, made him hold on like grim death.

"These horses are in a bad way," said Rossiter. "They were driven too hard last night. They can't do much to-day. I can get away by myself, but your horse is about done, and I am thinking of getting you away—not myself. We can stand them off yet, though. Ted Strong is not with them, and they have no leader. We can stand them off. I am not going to ride away and leave you. Right ahead here there is a sort of basin with a narrow entrance. If we get in there we can hold them off easily. We can pick them off with our rifles, one by one, as they come up. They

might have gone ahead and occupied it if they knew about it. There is a short cut to it, but none of them know about it. None of them, that is, except Ted Strong. He knows it's there, but he's not here now. None of the rest know about it, and that is what we will head for."

Through clouds of dust they clattered down the trail. Behind them came the noise of running steeds, and the shouts of the pursuers. The young rough riders were following them hard and fast. Rossiter could hear them cheering and calling at him to stop.

"Yell away," he snarled. "You can't stop us now. Yell all you want to, you fools!"

There was a sputtering fire from behind, a sudden crackling of revolvers, and bullets bit into the dust all around the fugitives. At a word from Kit Summers the young rough riders had fired a volley, more with the intent of frightening the runaways into halting than of hitting them. But Rossiter was not to be frightened that way. He laughed at Hendricks, who ducked clumsily, and drew his own weapon, sending three shots back over his shoulder without aiming or looking where he was shooting. They went wild of course, but the young rough riders could hear them rattling about the rocks above their heads. They cheered again, and that rousing cheer struck terror to the heart of Hendricks.

"Listen to 'em yell," panted Rossiter. "Just listen to 'em. Ted Strong's out of the way, though. I'll never see him again. I am through with him. Here is the basin, right before us. We'll get into that, and then let's see them come any further after us."

The trail divided at this point. One branch of it ran on, clear and straight, down the side of the mountain. The other ran slightly uphill for perhaps a hundred yards toward the basin which Earl had spoken of. The entrance could be plainly seen, flanked on either side by tall boulders, a narrow opening in the face of a cliff. Rossiter was turning the two steeds up the trail when a figure appeared in the very entrance of the place of refuge he had hoped to gain. The sun was now setting and its rays bathed the trail in a mellow, yellow light, so that the mounted figure which had suddenly

appeared was outlined in a golden glow that gave it the appearance of something more than human. It was the figure of a boy, brown-haired and steady-eyed, clad in khaki. A gleaming revolver was held in its hand, and mounted on a tall horse, it blocked the road completely. It was Ted Strong! Ted Strong, the boy Rossiter thought he had killed, who had remembered about the basin and ridden to it by a roundabout path, before letting his young rough riders show themselves to the fugitives.

Rossiter reeled back in the saddle, but only for a moment. A wild scream of fear came from his lips. His horse turned as if on a pivot. His spurs sank deep into its sides and away he bounded down the mountain side with the speed of a deer.

Hendricks tried to follow him, but, even as he wheeled, the revolver which Ted Strong held in his hand flashed and spoke. With the crack, the horse fell in an ugly, lumbering heap, pinioning Hendricks under it. When the other boys came up Ted Strong had handcuffed him and Rossiter had disappeared amid the trees which fringed the lower slopes of the mountain.

"No chase after him, boys," said Ted. "We have no warrant for his arrest. We have the man we came for, and I guess we have come to the end of the trail."

THE END.

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Ted Strong's Enemy

OR,

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